Washington State Responder Credentialing System

This section provides background information and research results on issues related to emergency responder credentialing in Washington State and to offer recommendations to the Committee on Homeland Security for future credentialing efforts, as well as potential criteria for a credentialing system. Smart cards, as well as other potential credentialing system components are discussed in Appendix 3.

Credentialing Process

What do we mean when we say "credential"? Law enforcement personnel call their badge a "credential." Hospitals refer to the process of allowing doctors to practice in their facilities as "credentialing." For the purposes of this discussion, we will be exploring both types of credentials:

- A factor entitling one to confidence, credit, or authority
- Physical evidence attesting to one's credit, confidence, or authority

Credentialing criteria refer to the qualifications and experiences of individuals to perform in a specific profession. The concept of credentialing is being promoted by federal agencies, such as the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP), but the lack of generalized standards limits their usefulness on a national basis at this point. A physical credential would likely take the form of an identification card which holds information on the responder who carries it.

Who needs to be credentialed? The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recognizes a dozen first responder disciplines, as well as volunteers, likely to be involved in the response to any widespread terrorist attack or natural disaster. Many of these paid personnel and volunteers already carry something they would identify as a credential or identification card issued by their jurisdiction or discipline. The challenge is to develop a common or standard credential which would be recognized throughout the region (or, potentially, the entire nation).

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) defines credentialing as "providing documentation that can authenticate and verify the certification and identity of designated incident managers and emergency responders. This system helps ensure that personnel representing various jurisdictional levels and functional disciplines possess a minimum common level of training, currency, experience, physical and mental fitness, and capability for the incident management or emergency responder position they are tasked to fill."

Accurate and rapid tracking of units and individual personnel at a large-scale disaster site is crucial. On-scene commanders need a good handle on WHO is on the scene, with WHAT certifications, training and capabilities they bring with them, WHEN did they arrive and depart, and WHERE are they located or

assigned. Initially, credentialing efforts in the United States have centered on serving as a reflection of certifications and standards achieved by individuals. However, two additional motivations are now cited: Perimeter and scene control, and responder health and safety.

HSI staff had the opportunity to discuss credentialing issues with supervisory personnel who worked the scene in Manhattan and at the Pentagon on 9/11. We have also been able to query federal, state, and local officials who were involved in the response to the Oklahoma City attack in 1995. In Oklahoma, over 28,000 first responders poured into the area in the week following the explosion. Even in this relatively benign environment (no radiation, chemicals, or biohazard), it took emergency managers nearly two weeks to set up an ad hoc credentialing system which would allow them to deploy assets in a systematic and secure fashion. In the face of a WMD incident, or a natural disaster (such as a pandemic flu) where the threat agent both lingers and spreads, the need to control access, deploy self-responders in an effective manner, and manage a wide-area response effort will be much more difficult. Given this threat, an investment in a pre-incident credentialing system may be a wise investment.

As part of HSI's recent Emergency Responder Training Interviews, subjects were asked whether "Standardized training could be used as a basis for credentialing emergency responders. Do you think that credentialing is needed or beneficial? Why?" The great preponderance of respondents believe that credentialing should be a natural outgrowth of setting standards. Interviewees feel a standard, statewide system will enable the assembly of more coherent response teams on a much shorter notice. A few individuals noted that the provision of a physical credential will also prompt many more personnel to complete the requirements within a standard. Beyond its utility in crisis response, a credential is seen as beneficial to individuals seeking portability of certified skills beyond their local jurisdiction, particularly in the case of those looking for new jobs.

Federal Efforts

The NIC is charged with developing systems which:

- Provide uniform certification programs that allow responders to provide mutual aid nationwide
- Ensure the proper identification of emergency responders
- Work in tandem with existing discipline credentialing bodies and states

The federal government has contracted with the Titan Corporation to pursue its credentialing goals. The initial aim is to create a National Emergency Responder Credentialing System which will be used to "routinely identify and dispatch emergency responders." A follow-on aspiration is to document credentialing "through a nationally accepted form of identification and/or through a record-keeping system, as required by NIMS."

The federal government believes a national credentialing system is necessary to:

- Help governments at all levels identify, request, and dispatch qualified emergency responders from other jurisdictions when needed.
- Serve to prevent unauthorized access to an incident site.

The NIC has put together working groups to classify positions which could be credentialed. These groups are tasked with identifying minimum qualifications, certification, licensing, education and training for each job title. Working groups currently active include Emergency Medical Services, Incident Management, Public Works, Fire/HAZMAT, and Search and Rescue.

HSI staff had a dialogue with Ivan Parkinson, Titan Corporation's credentialing project manager. He stated three individuals from Washington State are participating. All of them are a part of the Incident Management Working Group:

- Brian Calvert, Benton County Emergency Management; (509) 628-8471
- Jim Kadrmas, Emergency Management Division (EMD); (253) 512-7027
- Jim Mullen, Director (EMD); (253) 512-7001

Mr. Kadrmas told HSI that the Incident Management group had teleconferenced three times, and met once (Atlanta, 11/05). Thus far, the group has produced a problem statement and identified positions within both Incident Command and Emergency Management, which may need to be credentialed. This effort is in a formative stage. The NIC wants to involve state and local stakeholders in an effort to build the national consensus it feels will be required to include credentialing as an element of the National Mutual Aid and Resource Management Initiative.

Mr. Parkinson related that there is no compendium of state efforts regarding credentialing. He stated the lack of knowledge regarding state and local credentialing projects has presented a challenge for the federal work in this area. HSI staff committed to providing a summary of our research efforts, and the NIC will be provided a copy of this report.

The DHS First Responder Program "plans" to issue credentials to first responders so that the identity card they use in their daily routine can become their crisis identity card when needed. Craig Wilson, (speaking at the Smart Card Alliance Fall 2005 conference) on behalf of the program, stated the ID credentials will be consistent with the new federal government standards that call for smart card technology. The common trusted identity smart card, currently being slowly

implemented across the U.S. federal government, directly addresses this issue. During his address, Wilson gave some real life examples of emergency response scenarios where trained personnel were hindered due to a lack of a trusted common identity between federal, state, and local authorities.

The NIC, however, does not plan to actually issue credentials. The federal goal is to construct a framework which state and local jurisdictions can use in their credentialing efforts. While the NIC's goal is to set protocols and standards, it views the issuance of credentials as primarily a state responsibility.

Other States' Efforts

As part of HSI's research effort we studied recent attempts by other states and local jurisdictions to construct credentialing systems. Many jurisdictions are struggling with relevant and pragmatic criteria. DHS has begun its own research efforts, but has yet to offer any guidelines to states.

The most relevant projects which are planned or ongoing include:

Washington DC

Starting in January 2006, about 200,000 first responders in the Washington metropolitan area will receive biometric smart card IDs that will allow secure cooperation at sites where federal as well as state and local first responders are called in. The First Responder Partnership Initiative includes emergency personnel from the City of Washington, Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland, and Arlington, Fairfax and Prince William counties in Virginia. Officials supporting the initiative said they want the program to serve as a model for other regions to enhance cooperation and efficiency between state and local first responders and their federal counterparts. The card will identify first responders and their qualifications at the scene of an incident, allowing them to move into and out of secured areas. It can also serve as a platform for physical access to buildings, access to networks, human resource asset accountability, incident command and control, property/firearms accountability and National Incident Management System integration. The partnership is greatly aided by the high concentration of federal and military personnel in the Washington DC area. The federal government has made tremendous headway, particularly within the military, towards uniform issuance of standardized smart cards.

Maine

HSI staff had a dialogue with members of Maine's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) who have begun some basic credentialing work. EMA has been issuing ID's for several years, beginning with HAZMAT personnel, and now expanding to include other emergency response personnel. Their format is a simple one. On the front of the card is the EMA symbol, along with a picture of

the individual, name, title, and agency they work for. NIMS/ICS and HAZMAT-related training is denoted on the front with colored-coded stripes and inset writing describing levels. The back of the card includes information on medical/first aid and fire-fighting training, along with an issue date and an expiration date. There is a signature block for designated chiefs within regional jurisdictions. In support of the card, responders are asked to complete a qualification form which identifies training completed, together with personal information. As opposed to the "smart" cards described in the First Responder Partnership Initiative (above), Maine's system relies on simplicity.

New Jersey

New Jersey, which has identified nearly 145,000 first responders in-state, recently launched a training and tracking program which relates directly to credentialing efforts. A three-year, $2.5 million contract with GeoLearning Corporation is to provide assessments of individual competencies in security-related skills as well as compilations of detailed student training records on each participant. It also tracks attendance and performance records for a database used by emergency management teams when planning for and responding to disasters. While the project does not call for the provision of a physical credential, it is intended to be employed by emergency managers when responding to disasters. In theory, the system will allow planners to identify and contact responders with needed skills in the geographic proximity of an incident. At the time of this report, New Jersey officials were undecided on pursuing a smart card credential derived from GeoLearning project records.

Illinois

The State of Illinois had ambitious plans in the credentialing arena. The Illinois Terrorism Task Force (ITTF) Annual Report (2003) called for the "development and implementation of a secure credentialing and identification system, beginning with the state and local response teams." Illinois intends to eventually pre-issue smart card credentials to up to 100,000 emergency responders. The credentials will be printed with photo ID. The embedded chip will include fingerprint biometrics, an identity certificate issued by the state, and signed certifications of completed training. The system's components will include a secure web portal which will allow cleared individuals to enroll team members and manage certifications, as well as activate credentials and update data. A card management system will provide for the production and issuance of the smart cards. The field application includes a rugged laptop with a smartcard and fingerprint reader, which will verify identity with a single scan, confirm certifications, and site arrivals and departures. The pilot project calls for the issuing of 5,000 credentials.

New York

Marian Marrocolo, a planner with New York City's Office of Emergency Management (OEM), informed HSI staff that NYC has no **pre**-credentialing

system planned or in place. NYC does have a strong **post**-incident system which supports perimeter security and access control. In the wake of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, NYC OEM found the production, distribution, and validation of credentials was a massive, but critical, undertaking. OEM had to quickly develop a system that would produce credentials which are hard to counterfeit and allow those with different clearance levels into appropriate areas. The credential they developed was used in conjunction with an entity-issued identification. NYC was also very supportive of Corporate Emergency Access System (CEAS), a credentialing program developed by the Business Network of Emergency Resources (BNet) (see below). For NYC, a common, cross-discipline credential does not make sense, as most emergency responders are city employees; within the immediate urban area there are a limited number of discipline-specific credentials being utilized.

Missouri

The St Louis Area Regional Response System (STARRS), an interdisciplinary partnership of eight counties, included the implementation of a "universal ID credential for first responders and healthcare workers", utilizing UASI funds, as part of its 2004 strategy. HSI staff interviewed Margaret Hale, STARRS Deputy Director. Ms Hale informed us that, following several program delays, STARRS will be entering the implementation phase of its credentialing program in January, 2006. The "Universal ID Project" will begin by issuing cards to fire, police and EMS personnel. They hope to extend UASI funding to offer the cards to other emergency response disciplines eventually. Ms Hale referred us to the primary contractor for the project, the Regional Justice Information Service Commission (REJIS). HSI contacted Mr. Paul Newhouse, REJIS General Manager, who shared a great deal of information on the project. He stated that they had conducted a long development phase, in conjunction with user groups, to establish requirements. REJIS then sought out and compared suppliers for project components. The programming phase has now been completed and full production status is expected in February 2006. The card will eventually supplant, not supplement, existing first responder IDs. The card includes a photograph, bar code, and a small section for local jurisdictions to place their own seal or logo. The bar code contains personal demographic data, but most of the data, including certified course completions and skill sets, i.e. languages spoken, is held on the central project server located at REJIS. Information is entered by local jurisdictions. This was done so that the system is not seen as autocratic. An individual's organization makes a decision as to what information is to be shared within the system. It is agreed that whatever data is entered can be shared among first response organizations in the eight-county area. There is still an ongoing discussion as to how long the cards will be valid. This is being driven by security concerns versus costs. Those costs are expected to be "as little as several dollars per card once the system is fully realized" according to Newhouse. There is also continuing discussion about future inclusion of medical

information within the system. REJIS has also been asked to study the possibility of leveraging the Universal ID Project to provide temporary IDs to volunteers, and to consider merging data with B-Team software currently being implemented at all eight EOCs in the STARRS area. Mr. Newhouse stated that REJIS would be willing to share lessons learned as they begin to implement the project in 2006.

Responder Health and Safety

In addition to the initial motivations for credentialing efforts, some efforts are now being made to respond to worker health and safety concerns.

Several organizations, including the Center to Protect Workers Rights and the Operating Engineers National HAZMAT Program are piloting “smart” cards containing small chips capable of holding enormous amounts of information about the worker, including all of the training that is current, respirator fit, medical testing information, and security clearance. These credentialing efforts center on worker safety issues.

The report, Protecting Emergency Responders, Volume 3: Safety Management in Disaster and Terrorism Response," from the federal Department of Health and Human Services states that:

“The emergency response community should put in place structures and preparedness efforts that will formalize an integrated, incident-wide approach to safety management at major disaster response operations. Just as a key goal of the ICS is to facilitate integration of many operational assets as the demands of a response operation increase, mechanisms must be available to allow safety management efforts to scale up as well. Effective safety management requires mechanisms to provide for the safety needs of all responders, including any volunteers. Safety management depends on knowing who is operating at the disaster scene and in what capacities. Personnel accountability systems are a source of this information.”

Study discussions with responders suggest that there is broad agreement on the importance of scene control as a safety enforcement strategy. If a hard perimeter can be put in place around a scene and the entry points controlled, crossing the perimeter becomes an opportunity to make certain that all responders entering the scene are informed, trained, and equipped in accordance with the response safety procedures. Responders who are not in compliance can be identified and denied access to the scene.

Credentialing Recommendations

In order to achieve any meaningful advance beyond current, jurisdiction/organization-based ID systems, any Washington State credential

which is developed should be based on shared, perhaps mandated, cross-discipline standards. HSI believes that the place to begin a statewide conversation on credentialing is with the more difficult discussion of barriers to the creation of training standards.

If we are able to agree on specific standards, a common credential could then follow. Our challenge is to develop a scalable system which has hardened components and which can operate under difficult conditions. In order to be cost-effective and sustainable, system components must also serve a day-to-day purpose for emergency responders at all levels. The State-issued credential would have to supplant or be incorporated into local ID's, otherwise individuals would need to carry multiple cards, and, inevitably the State credential would be left at home on the one day it is needed.

There is no lack of private providers willing to supply systems and components to meet this perceived requirement. If HSI were asked to make a specific recommendation on an existing provider, we would recommend an examination of systems currently being offered by GeoLearning. The State of New Jersey (see above), as well as the Department of Homeland Security, have contracted with GeoLearning to construct and administer learning management systems (LMS) which may support cross-discipline credentialing in the future. In Washington State, the Department of Health and the Department of Personnel have both entered into agreements with GeoLearning for LMS systems to support training for their staffs. The difficult part of any credentialing "system" is the construction and maintenance of a training and standards tracking system, which is what GeoLearning provides. Introduction of a SMART card and an on-site reader system can easily be acquired if a certification system is extant.

With enough time and resource, a cross-disciplinary credentialing system could be constructed in Washington State. However, given current conditions (growing apathy concerning homeland security in the absence of domestic follow-on attacks to 9/11; lack of centralized authority in a "home rule" state; diminishing funding for preparedness projects) we believe a rational cost-benefit analysis would preclude any major immediate investment in a credentialing system. In the absence of any precise guidelines, or even general protocols from the Department of Homeland Security it would be difficult to achieve any high degree of confidence that any current effort on the State's part would mesh with a future national effort.

There are, however, some steps which could be taken now. Specifically, the Homeland Security Institute recommends:

Recommendation:
Creation of a disappearing task force (DTF) of State identification system experts, emergency managers, and first response personnel, tasked with studying credentials currently being utilized by local jurisdictions in Washington,

with a goal of recommending a common format and standard. Using this report as a starting point, the DTF will present their findings to the Committee for Homeland Security. Given clear direction, and enough time, a State credential could be established through adoption of uniform standards for individual identification cards (issued locally) across all of the emergency response disciplines.

Recommendation:
Key personnel from within the State should remain active participants in the NIMS Integration Center working group for the National Emergency Responder Credentialing System.

Recommendation:
The State can aggressively pursue competitive grant funding (separate from existing formula-grant resource) which would support a credentialing pilot project.

Recommendation:
Lessons learned can be compiled from other states which are attempting to put together credentialing systems. HSI cannot currently recommend any single ongoing effort as a template for Washington's plan. The First Responder Partnership Initiative, covering the Washington DC region, should be closely monitored as it begins its implementation phase in 2006.

Recommendation:
The Emergency Management Council should adopt recommended State training standards, upon which a credentialing system could begin to be established.

Criteria for any *future* Washington State Emergency Responder Credentialing System should include consideration of:

- The setting of cross-discipline standards as a baseline to ensure reasonable levels of both quality and uniformity are met.

- An ability to seamlessly merge with any future National Emergency Responder Credentialing System.

- Creation of a State registry of certified individuals, including course completions, contact information, and certifications. HSI has constructed a database of certified homeland security trainers based on input from the State Emergency Management Division as well as regional and county emergency managers.

- Utilization of proven SMART card technology and robust on-scene readers in the provision of any physical system components.

- Incorporation of current discipline-specific certification efforts to ensure these programs are complimentary to cross-discipline credentialing.

To read the full report, Click on Projects > First Responders